

Zalman Kaplanas And His Schoolmates



This is a group photograph of my class in lyceum. The picture was taken in 1939 by photographer Levinas. I am the fourth from the left in the top row, my best friend, Josele Katz, is next to me.

In 1927 I went to the Jewish elementary school. All subjects were taught in Hebrew there, and I was well up in that language. Yiddish was spoken at home as well as in the household of both grandfathers, I learnt Hebrew very quickly at school. Thus, I was fluent in both languages in my childhood. I studied for three years in the elementary school. I was a good student. It was easy for me to study. Here I met my first friends and my bosom friend Joseph, Josele, as we called him tenderly. We spent time together after school, wandering through the beautiful park Tel Aviv. When we finished school, my parents decided that I should go on with my studies. Unfortunately the Jewish private school wasn't affordable for my parents, so I entered the state Lithuanian lyceum, having passed entrance exams rather easily.

There were different nationalities in the lyceum. There were a lot of Lithuanians and Jews. The teachers treated us very well. Back in that time Jews were protected as there were Jewish senators in Lithuania. There was even a department on Jewish issues in parliament. All subjects were taught in Lithuanian. The only subject we were exempt from was the Bible studies. Saturday was a school day and Jews as well as other students were supposed to attend classes. Nobody was exempt from studies on Sabbath. Some Jewish children weren't allowed to attend classes on Sabbath. But acquiring knowledge was a priority for our family. Paying tribute to traditions was in the second place. I was truly prepared for my bar mitzvah. Grandpa Abba took me to a melamed, who taught me prayers, putting on tefillin. At the age of 13 I went through the rite of bar mitzvah in the synagogue. Mother made a festive dinner in accordance with the traditions. Mother invited our relatives and my friend Josele. My bar mitzvah was the last time I paid tribute to the Jewish tradition.

At that time a lot of political parties and groups were emerging in Lithuania. There were underground Communists. There were only five of them in the town, and everybody knew who they were. There were several Zionist organizations such as Betar, Maccabi, representatives of the

Revisionist Zionism movement etc. Our family was apolitical. Both my mother and father were politically dispassionate.

In 1939, I finished lyceum and went to Kaunas University.